

# THE MILLION DOLLAR MYSTERY—PART 3

have been so successful all these years that you have grown overconfident. I tell you that there is a desperately shrewd man somewhere back of all this. Mark me, I do not believe Hargrave is dead. He is in hiding. It may be near by. He may have dropped from the balloon before it left land. The man they picked up may be Orta, the aeronaut. The five thousand might have been his fee for rescuing Hargrave. Here is the greatest thing we've ever been up against; and you start in with every day methods!"

"Little woman, don't let your tongue run away with you too far."

"I'm not the least bit afraid of you, Leo. You need me, and it has never been more apparent than at this moment."

"All right. I fell by the wayside this trip. Truthfully, I realized it five minutes after the men were gone. The only clever thing I did was to keep the mask on my face. They can't come back at me. But the thing looked so easy; and it would have worked but for Norton's appearance."

"You all but compromised me. That butler worries me a little." Her expression lost its anger and grew thoughtful. "He's always about, somewhere. Do you think Hargrave took him into his confidence?"

"Can't tell. He's been watched straight for 40 hours. He hasn't mailed a letter or telephoned to any place but the grocery. There have been no telegrams. Some one in that house knows where the money is, and it's ten to one that it will be the girl."

"She looks enough like Katrina to be her ghost."

Braine went over to the window and stared up at the stars.

"You have made a good impression on the girl!" with his back still toward her.

"I had her in my arms."

"Olga, my hat is off to you," turning now that his face was again in repose. "Your very frankness regarding your relationship will pull the wool over their eyes. Of course they'll make inquiries and they'll find out that you haven't lied. It's perfect. Not even that newspaper weasel will see anything wrong. Toward you they will eventually ease up and you can act without their even dreaming your part in the business. We must not be seen in public any more. This butler may know where I stand even though he cannot prove it. Now, I'm going to tell you something. Perhaps you've long since guessed it. Katrina was mine till Hargrave—never mind what his name was then—till Hargrave came into the fold. So sure of her was I that I used her as a lure to bring him to us. She fell in love with him, but too late to warn him. I had the satisfaction of seeing him cast her aside, curse her, and leave her. In one thing she fooled us all. I never knew of the child till you told me."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Hargrave was madly in love with her. He cursed her, but he came back to the house to forgive her, to find that she had been seized by the secret police and entombed in the fortress. I had my revenge. It was I who sent in the information, practically bogus. But in Russia they never question; they act and forget. So he had a daughter!"

He began pacing the floor, his hands behind his back; and the woman watched him, oscillating between love and fear. He came to a halt abruptly and looked down at her.

"Don't worry. You have no rival. I'll leave the daughter to your tender mercies."

"The butler," she said, "has full powers of attorney to act for Hargrave while absent, up to the day the girl becomes of legal age."

"I'll keep an eye on our friend Jones. From now on, day and night, there will be a cat at the knothole, and 'ware mouse! Could you make up anything like this girl?" suddenly.

"A fair likeness."

"Do it. Go to the ship which picked up the man at sea and quiz the captain. Either the aviator or Hargrave is alive. It is important to learn which at once. Be very careful; play the game only as you know how to play it. And if Hargrave is alive, we win. Tomorrow morning, early. Tears of anguish, and all that. Sailors are easy when a woman weeps. No color, remember; just the yellow wig and the salient features. Now, by-ty!"

"Aren't you going to kiss me, Leo?" He caught her hands. "There is a species of Delilah about you, Olga. A kiss tonight from your lips would snip my locks; and I need a clear head. Whether we fall or win, when this game is played you shall be my wife." He kissed the hands and strode out into the hall.

The woman gazed down at her small white hands and smiled tenderly. (The tigress has her tender moments!) He meant it!

She went into her dressing room and for an hour or more worked over her face and hair, till she was certain that if the captain of the ship described her to anyone else he could not fail to give a fair description of Florence Hargrave.

But Norton reached the captain first. Other reporters had besieged him, but they had succeeded in gathering the vaguest kind of information. They had no description of Hargrave, while Norton had. Before going down to the boat, however, he had delved into the past of the Princess Olga Perigoff. It cost him a pocketful of money, but the end justified the means. The princess had no past worth mentioning. By piecing this and that together he became assured that she had told the simple truth regarding the relationship to Florence's mother. A cablegram had given him all the facts in her history; there were no gaps or discre-

pancies. It was clear and frank. Trust a Russian secret agent to know what he was talking about.

So Norton's suspicions—and he had entertained some—were completely lulled to sleep. And he wouldn't have doubted her at all except for the fact that Braine had been with her when he had introduced Hargrave. Hargrave had feared Braine; that much the reporter had elicited from the butler. But there wasn't the slightest evidence. Braine had been in New York for nearly six years. The princess had arrived in the city but a year gone. And Braine was a member of several fashionable clubs, never touched cards, and seldom drank. He was an expert chess player and a wonderful amateur billiardist. Perhaps Jones, the taciturn and inscrutable, had not told him all he knew regarding his master's past. Well, well; he had in his time untangled worse snarls. The office had turned him loose, a free lance, to handle the case as he saw fit, to turn in the story when it was complete.

But what a story it was going to be when he cleared it up! The more mystifying it was, the greater the rest and sport for him. Norton was like a

warehouse, and later depart without his packet.

"Easy as dropping my mudhook."

"That's all," Norton gave the captain the money. "Good-by and many thanks."

"Don't mention it."

Norton left the slip and proceeded to the office of the warehouse. He approached the manager's desk.

"Hello, Grannis, old top!"

The man looked up from his work smilingly. Then his face brightened.

"Norton? What's brought you here? O, yes; that balloon business. Sit down."

"What kind of a man is the captain of that old hooker in the slip?"

"Shifty in gun running, but otherwise as square as a die. Looks funny to see an old tub like that fixed up with wireless; but that has saved his neck a dozen times when he was running it into a noose. Not going to interview me, are you?"

"No. I'm going to ask you to do me a little favor."

"They always say that. But spin her out. If it doesn't cost me my job, it's yours."

"Well, there will be a person making inquiries about the mysterious aeronaut. All I want you to say is, that he left a packet with you, that you've put it in that safe till he calls to claim it."

Grannis nibbled the end of his pen. "Suppose some one should come and demand that I open the safe and deliver?"

"All you've got to do is to tell them to show the receipt signed by you."

The warehouse manager laughed. "Got a lot of sense in that ivory dome of yours. All right. But if anything happens you've got to come around and back me up. What's it about?"

"That I dare not tell you. This much, I'm laying a trap and I want some one I don't know to fall into it."

"On your way, James. But if you don't send me some prize fight tickets next week for this, I'll never do you another favor."

In reply Norton took from his pocket two bits of pasteboard and laid them on the desk. "I knew you'd be wanting something like this."

"Ringaldee!" cried Grannis. "You reporters are lucky devils!"

"I'd go myself if there was any earthly chance of a real scrap. You make me laugh, Gran. You're always going, always hoping the next one will be a real one. But it's all bunk. The pugs are the biggest fakers on top the sod. They've got us newspaper men done to a frazzle."

"I guess you're right. Well, count on me regarding that mysterious bundle in the safe."

"At three o'clock this afternoon I want you to call me up. If no one has called, why the game is up. But if some one does come around and make inquiries, don't fail to let me know."

"I'll be here till five. I'd better call you up then."

Then Norton returned home and idled about till afternoon. He went over to Riverdale. Five times he walked up and down the front of the Hargrave place, finally picked up his courage and walked to the door. After all, he was a lucky mortal. He had a good excuse to visit this house every day in the week. And there was something tantalizing in the risk he took. Besides, he wanted to prove to himself whether it was a passing fancy or something deeper. That's the way with humans; we never see a sign "Fresh Paint" that we don't have to prove it.

He chatted with Florence for a while and found that, for all she might be gulleible to the world, she was a good linguist, a fine musician, and talked with remarkable keenness about books and arts. But unless he roused her, the sadness of her position always lay written in her face. It was not difficult for him to conjure up her dreams in coming to the city and the blow which, like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, had shattered them ruthlessly.

"You must come every day and tell me how you have progressed," she said.

"I'll obey that order gladly, whenever I can possibly do it. My visits will always be short."

"That is not necessary."

"No," said Norton in his heart, "but it is wise."

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"And the man found?" The butler's voice was tense.

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evidently been weeping. When the captain, susceptible like all sailors, saw her his promises to Norton took wings.

"This is Captain Hagan?" she asked, balling the handkerchief she held in her hand.

"Yes, miss. What can I do for you?"

He put his hands embarrassedly into his pockets—and felt the crisp bills. But for that magic touch he would have forgotten his lines. He squared his shoulders.

"I have every assurance that the man you picked up at sea is my father. I am Florence Hargrave. Tell me everything."

The captain's very blundering deceived her. "And then he hustled down the gang-plank and headed for that warehouse. He had a package which he was as tender of as if it had been dynamite."

"Thank you!" impulsively.

"A man has to do his duty, miss. A sailor's always glad to rescue a man at sea," awkwardly.

When she finally went down the gangplank the sigh the captain heaved was almost as loud as the exhaust from the donkey engines which were working out the crates of lemons from the hold.

"Maybe she is his daughter; but two hundred is two hundred, and I'm a poor sailor man."

Then Grannis came in for his troubles. What was a chap to do when a pretty girl appealed to him?

"I am sorry, miss, but I can't give you that package. I gave the man a receipt and till it is presented to me the package must remain in yonder safe. You understand enough about the business to realize that. I did not solicit the job. It was thrust upon me. I'd give a hundred dollars if the blame thing was out of my safe. You say it is your fortune. That hasn't been proved. It may be gunpowder, dynamite. I'm sorry, but you will have to find your father and bring the receipt."

The young woman left the warehouse, dabbing her eyes with the sodden handkerchief.

"I wonder," mused Grannis, as he watched her from the window, "I wonder what the deuce that chap Norton is up to. The girl might have been the man's daughter. . . . Good Lord, what an ass I am! There wasn't any man!" And so he reached over for the telephone.

Immediately upon receipt of the message the reporter set his machinery in motion. Some time before dawn he would know who the arch-conspirator was. He questioned Grannis thoroughly, and Grannis' description tallied amazingly with that of Florence Hargrave. But a call over the wire proved to him conclusively that Florence had not been out of the house that morning.

On the morrow the newspapers had scare-heads about an attempt to rob the Duffy warehouse. It appeared that the police had been tipped beforehand and were on the grounds in time to gather in several notorious gunmen, who, under pressure of the third degree, vowed that they had been hired and paid by a man in a mask and had not the slightest idea what he wanted them to raid. Nothing further could be gotten out of the gunmen. That they were lying the police had no doubt, but they were up against a stout wall and all

they could do was to hold the men for the grand jury.

Norton was in a fine temper. After all his careful planning he had gained nothing—absolutely nothing. But wait; he had gained something—the bitter enmity of a cunning and desperate man, who had been forced to remain hidden under the pier till almost dawn.

CHAPTER IV.

The Flat on the Top Floor.

Braine crawled from his uncomfortable hiding place. His clothes were soiled and damp, his hat gone. By a hair's breadth he had escaped the clever trap laid for him. Hargrave was alive, he had escaped; Braine was as certain of this fact as he was of his own breathing. He now knew how to account for the flickering light in the upper story of the warehouse. His ancient enemy had been watch-

ing him all the time. More than this, Hargrave and the meddling reporter were in collusion. In the flare of lights at the end of the gun-play he had caught the profile of the reporter. Here was a dangerous man, who must be watched with the utmost care.

He, Braine, had been lured to commit an overt act, and by the rarest good luck had escaped with nothing more serious than a cold chill and a galling disappointment.

He crawled along the top of the pier, listening, sending his dark-accustomed glance hither and thither. The sky in the east was growing paler and paler. In and out among the bales of wool, bags of coffee and lemon crates he slowly and cautiously wormed his way. A watchman patrolled the office side of the warehouse, and Braine found it possible to creep around the other way, thence into the street. After that he straightened up, sought a second-hand shop and purchased a soft hat, which he pulled down over his eyes.

He had half a dozen rooms which he always kept in readiness for such adventures as this. He rented them furnished in small hotels which never asked questions of their patrons. To one of these he went as fast as his weary legs could carry him. He always carried the key. Once in his room he donned fresh wearing apparel, linen, shoes, and shaved. Then he proceeded downstairs, the second-hand hat shading his eyes and the upper part of his face.

At half past twelve Norton entered the Knickerbocker cafe-restaurant, and the first person he noticed was Braine, reading the morning's paper, propped up against the water carafe. Evidently he had just ordered, for there was nothing on his plate. Norton walked over and laid his hand upon Braine's shoulder. The man looked up with mild curiosity.

"Why, Norton, sit down, sit down! Have you had lunch? No? Join me."

"Thanks. Came in for my breakfast," said Norton, drawing out the chair. Braine was sitting with his back to the wall on the lounge-seat.

"I wonder if you newspaper men ever eat a real, true enough breakfast. I should think the hours you lead would kill you off. Anything new on the Hargrave story?"

"I'm not handling that," the reporter lied cheerfully. "Didn't want to. I knew him rather intimately. I've a horror of dead people, and don't want to be called upon to identify the body when they find it."

"Then you think they will find it?"

"I don't know. It's a strange mixup. I'm not on the story, mind you; but I was in the locality of Duffy's warehouse late last night and fell into a gunman rumpus."

"Yes, I read about that. What were they after?"

"You've got me there. No one seems to know. Some cock and bull story about there being something valuable. There was."

"What was it? The report in this paper